CORE
Metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
Provided by Middlesex University Research Repository

Middlesex University Research Repository

An open access repository of

Middlesex University research

http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk

Hafford-Letchfield, Trish (2015) Power. In: Ethics and values in social work practice. Routledge, London, UK, pp. 1-15. ISBN 9780335245291 (Accepted - In Press)

Submitted Version

Available from Middlesex University's Research Repository at http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/13844/

Copyright:

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this thesis/research project are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge. Any use of the thesis/research project for private study or research must be properly acknowledged with reference to the work's full bibliographic details.

This thesis/research project may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from it, or its content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s).

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address:

eprints@mdx.ac.uk

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

Chapter Six: Power

Trish Hafford-Letchfield

Introduction

This chapter aims to look closer at how these tensions are acknowledged and worked with. Through the examination of two key scenarios we will consider some of the challenges in relation to exercising power ethically and the dilemmas faced in staying close to the values of social work in its everyday context. Power is a challenging concept to operationalise within social work practice particularly given the strong steer by government exercised through its extensive legislative, policy and procedural guidance. The nature of 'power' or 'empowerment' also raises fundamental questions about the very purpose of social work itself and what it aims to achieve (Smith, 2008, p2). Questions have been raised about whether social workers can be truly anti-oppressive in their practice given that they inevitably bring more power to their interactions with service users than vice versa (Sakamoto and Pitner, 2005; Cocker and Hafford-Letchfield, forthcoming). This seemingly discordant relationship with power has been illustrated in a developing sense of helplessness in the face of increasing managerialism in which professional expertise has been usurped by increasing actuarial activities (Bar-On, 2002; Harris, 2003; Hafford-Letchfield, 2010). Despite a plethora of government policy directives which seek to promote the rights, citizenship and empowerment of different service user groups, some of the assumptions underpinning these policies have directly contributed to tensions for social workers in their everyday practice. An all-party UK parliamentary inquiry into the state of social work (BASW, 2013) for example, noted that the effects of well-intentioned new government policies have negated many of their intended outcomes. The extent of subsequent macro and micro-management from above was identified as instrumental in hindering any potential for facilitating a solution-led focus closer to where practice takes place. Within this environment, bifurcated demands about how to effectively share and distribute power therefore necessitate that social workers develop both insight and a better understanding of discourses about power in order to engage with it effectively.

This is all of course, easier said than done. Ethical and practical dilemmas for social work practitioners will arise whenever power is present, and this may occur at a number of levels in your relationships with service users; with other professionals, or within your own organisational hierarchies. Debates about social work's use of delegated authority, power and decision making alongside the roles, responsibilities and expectations of other stakeholders are regularly scrutinised in the media about risk and protection of vulnerable people as well as being documented in highly publicised serious case reviews (Laming, 2009; Munro, 2010; Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board, 2013). Playing these debates out in the public arena exerts a powerful influence on the way in which the social work profession is positioned accompanied by a corresponding increase in closer surveillance and defensive practice. These events inevitably divert attention from examining power in its socio-economic and political context in relation to the reality of structural issues affecting the lives of service users. Here lies the real irony, since whilst having limited capacity to exercise

change, as holders of statutory authority, social workers are also expected to exercise further control and constraints with those already perceived to be oppressed. It is hardly surprising then that social workers are sometimes uncomfortable with the phenomenon of power.

We start by focussing on the concept of professional by theorising competing discourses of empowerment in social work and its key concepts drawing, particularly the explanatory powers of the critical social theorist Foucault (1991). We will then problematise the concept of power by explicitly drawing on user and carers own accounts from the literature to demonstrate different external and internal influences on the root causes of disempowerment. Within this chapter we will focus specifically on everyday issues around 'safeguarding' and 'vulnerability' in relation to how different service users are supported to make decisions about their own care and support. 'Empowerment' is not something professionals just 'do' to people but is a reflexive activity or process initiated and sustained by others as well as by service users. Empowerment requires an appropriate climate, relationship, resources and procedural means through which people can enhance their own lives. Core aspects of this model derive from both a value base concerned with social justice, self-determination and self-actualization, and a theory base emphasizing the significance of power in social relationships. Some of these issues have been aired in other chapters in this book relating to social justice and relationship based practice. We will be encouraging you to consider more creative approaches through the use of narrative, and relationship based approaches which emphasise the centrality of experience, critical reflection, meaning making and importance of flexible and facilitative relationships within social work practice.

Theoretical aspects of power

Power can be defined as the ability or capacity to act or to exercise influence (Luke's, 2005) and the most significant contribution to the study of power is provided from sociology. However in social work and social care, whilst power is frequently alluded to in theory and practice, empirical studies or in-depth analysis tends to be more of a rarity. As a field of practice, Webb (2010) argues that social work itself is constituted as a complex hierarchy of material and symbolic power relations. Its attempt to redistribute power particularly through activities of assessment and service provision, guided by statutory, political, social and economic frameworks is also driven by professional values such as the recognition of cultural diversity and the promotion of person-centred approaches. Further layers are introduced through the role that social work plays in relation to the Welfare State, as well and complicated by the direct role that the State itself plays in structuring power relations. According to some perspectives, social work is a major social institution that legitimates the power contained in modern democratic capitalist states which Webb (2010) revealingly describes as "(being) complicitous, as a functionary apparatus, but also decidedly hostile to its machinations" (p2369).

Typologies of power

Power can operate in various ways for example as personal, dispersed, relational and dispositional (Lukes, 2005). Within social work, power is also frequently discussed in

relation to its abuse (as illustrated in serious case reviews). Luke's typology (2005) refers to the different dimensions of power such as: coercion, influence, force, authority or manipulation. According to Smith (2008), these go beyond the overt authority by one individual over another to one which is contextual or institutional. Among the most widely used conceptualizations of social power is the five-fold typology developed by French and Raven (1986). They identified several sources, the themes of which have been elaborated for their usefulness in considering power in everyday social work practice:

1. ***Referent power***: this refers to situations where you may identify with an individual or group for example someone who has a strong leadership style or skills and thus has influence over others because of the respect they command. Alternatively, you may comply with your managers' requests because you respect them even if you don't necessarily agree with all of their decisions!

2. ***Expert power***: this source of power comes with the authority and skills attributed to substantial knowledge and expertise. A common example might be the authority attributed to doctors and psychiatrists within an interprofessional team or in relation to your own power, as a qualified professional over service users. Recognition of the expertise and knowledge of service users is also essential to the principles of co-production where people and professional combine their expertise and experience to explore problems and collectively find appropriate solutions.

3. ***Reward power*** lies with those who have the ability to provide incentives and rewards and increases with the magnitude that this can mediated. For example, within assessments of carers for adoption and fostering, the social worker holds power in determining the nature of exchange and type of information required. Foster carers may have to comply with how they think the social worker wants them to be perceived in order to become 'approved'. Hicks (forthcoming) has highlighted how social work can make powerful claims and decisions about families and, at times, concerns have been raised about the possibility of oppressive and damaging practice, especially in relation to black, gay, lesbian or single-parent families.

4. ***Coercive or punishment powers*** exists where there is an ability to impose force or punish others. This can be subtle for example through the peer pressure within teams where conforming prevents socially inclusion such as not 'coming out' as gay or lesbian in a predominately heterosexual team. This may also be present within supervision, for example in accepting further allocation of work beyond what a person might be able to manage but where the social worker perceives themselves to be made to feel inadequate by saying no. The principal aim of coercive power is compliance and at an organizational level can be seen in the sometimes unquestioning compliance with excessive recording requirements related to government timescales. Another example is illustrated in the case prior to the introduction of the Mental Capacity Act (2005) and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (2009) which provides statutory guidelines in relation to decision making on behalf of vulnerable adults unable to give their informed consent. Before their implementation, coercion in its most friendly guise was common custom and practice when admitting or detaining vulnerable

adults to living in a residential home in the absence of any statutory guidance with occasional consequences for human rights abuse.

5. Legitimate power refers to sources of authority generally accepted because of one's position or generally accepted ways of working. Working to social work legislation confers legitimate power and also the normative acceptance of our professional code of practice. Managers for example have legitimate power derived from their formal role in the organisational hierarchy.

As organisations have become more integrated at a structural level, subsequent interprofessional working has revealed continuing undermining or diffusion of professional power. Government emphasis on even further integration (DH, 2013) cites the need to create a culture of cooperation and coordination between health, social care, public health, other local services and the Third sector to provide the basis for an aspirational culture in which individuals can gain greater control. Putting social work on a par with other professionals has also achieved the potential for a much richer knowledge and evidence base, which is still growing. However, both the unforgiving scale and pace of these reconfigurations of care provision and social work services have ironically led to social work having a much weaker and often insufficiently negotiated presence in some of these organizational structures and less of a voice.

The importance of building partnerships and alliances with service users to pioneer new and different approaches to providing individual and collective support for them has therefore never been greater. The introduction of personalisation into social care (HMG, 2008) has brought into question the various core functions of social work assessment, advocacy and brokerage, safeguarding and capacity, which according to some contain elements of conflict and incompatibility (Lymbery and Postle, 2010). The future for social work in this policy area runs a strong risk of becoming both fragmented and isolated Similarly, within the literature on user participation for example there is tension expressed between the fear of possession of power and fear of loss of power (Pinkey, 2011) which speaks of the difficult and sometimes uncomfortable relationships resulting from the possession and use of power when intervening in service users lives (Carr, 2007; Pinkey, 2011). Evidence from service users own narratives (Hafford-Letchfield, 2011) provides continuing evidence which contradicts social work's own mission and values supposedly to be profoundly shaped by notions of enabling, empowering and participatory ethics. When viewed through these different lenses we can see how power is constituted at so many different levels for example between government and professionals, within organizational hierarchies, between different groups of professionals and finally between professionals and service users. Language is another means in which this is expressed.

The language of power

As a concept, the definition of power remains contested as it is so critical to everyday life and innately value-dependent and linguistically problematic (Barr-On, 2002). Much has been written about the impact of language in preserving professional power and resources. For

example, certain terms used to describe service users have been claimed as a political endeavour (Heffernan, 2006, p140). Evolving terminologies such as 'client', 'consumer' to the current 'service user' reflect political ideologies influencing the overall provision of social care services. The concept of choice has played an important role in the neoliberal agenda and remains the mantra of the UK Coalition government where choice of provider for example, is seen as the mechanism for increasing the quality and efficiency of services through conceptualising individuals as discerning consumers (Stevens et al, 2011). Making ourselves aware of these debates about terminology enables us to be more critical about the potential use of labelling which may be stigmatising.

The provision of direct payments and individualised budgets both stress the importance of the interaction between the person receiving and the person providing support in shaping services users own determined outcomes and altering the power dynamic in doing so through delegated control (Glendinning, 2009). There are controversies however, in relation to potential conflicts that arise from the focus on choice for unpredictable inequities. Research by Leece and Leece (2006) demonstrated how these might favour people with existing financial and social capital who are both able to make best use of resources and to combine them with their own at the expense of other groups and concerns. However, giving people using services more of a role in assessing their own needs and in making choices about the kinds of services they want to 'purchase' challenges existing power relationships with social workers and other professionals. Gate keeping roles remain in terms of assessing eligibility and negotiating resource allocation. There are concerns about managing risk where services may not be regulated, resources misused or vulnerable service users are at risk of abuse or perceived as coming to harm through their choices. As both a policy requirement and social work value, choice will always be associated with restraint because of its association with the use of public funds and legal frameworks. According to Martins et al (2011) these public mandates will lead to social workers always exercising control over what is accepted as legitimate ways of spending public welfare funds, creating a built-in power imbalance (p271).

As social care work is concerned with both individual people and wider society, particularly with those deemed 'vulnerable', standpoint theory has been useful for analysing power relations. One example is how we work with older people by being tuned in to both the adverse effects of the ageing process on the individual (critical realism) and taking account of how this interacts with other complex social, economic problems and political ideologies about later life such as those enshrined in the concept coined by Townsend of 'structured dependency' (Townsend, 2006). Whilst policies and practice with older people may on the one hand appear to be promoting empowerment and self-directed support, they may also be subject to increased rationing and changes in resource allocation thus giving rise to priorities that are increasingly oriented towards contradictory economic, biomedical and professional determinants of care. Grenier and Guberman (2009) identify a number of different types of social exclusion and thus powerlessness arising from the direct effects of government policies and organisational practices. These, they assert, work to deprive people of the capacity to exercise their rights or participate in activities that might normally be taken for granted by ordinary citizens. Their framework provides a valuable means to critically analyse service

users' situations and for articulating the ways that policies and practices operate (e.g. institutional, social and political) not only limit older people's participation but also their expressions of identity and personhood. We will now look at how this is illustrated in the case study of Olga below.

Case study no 1

Olga is an 84 year old Polish woman living alone since her partner died 9 months ago. She has a history of schizophrenia and depression. She recently spent four weeks in hospital following a stroke and undertook a short period of rehabilitation. Since discharge from hospital she has been relatively confined to her home most of the week. Only a year beforehand, Olga was relatively active in the local Polish Women's Labour Association. She was told by the hospital staff that it could be very risky for her to now go out alone but at the same time she was assessed as not meeting the eligibility criteria thresholds for support with meeting her' social' needs. Olga relies mostly on her state pension and is reliant on a range of prescribed medication. Olga has however chosen to reduce some of these medicines as she is concerned about high prescription fees. Olga has a carer who comes in to assist her with her personal care. Whilst the carer is kind and reliable, Olga feels a bit reluctant to ask her to do any extra things for her whilst she is there. Her overall feeling is one of intense gratitude for the help she feels she is getting in that others of a similar age and situation might not be so fortunate. Sometimes the carer will do her a 'special favour' as she recognises how "vulnerable and frail" Olga really is.

When thinking through Olga's situation we can identify 'symbolic exclusion' through the sense of deservedness that Olga perceives through her identity as an older person in society. Older people are often problematised in policy terms, for example, as a potential drain on the public purse and older people may internalise these discourses. Exclusion on the basis of Olga's 'identity' is likely to arise in situations where carers and other professionals have explicitly identified her as frail or dependent or gear their responses to this common form of identity. This can shift the focus of care relationships to looking just at basic needs and in Olga's case may serve to overlook her identity as a Polish woman with a personal history in which she has made a meaningful contribution to society and can continue to make if the circumstances facilitate this. Olga might be described as a 'schizophrenic' rather than as a person living independently with mental illness. The classification of Olga's needs into eligibility for certain services further leads to 'institutional exclusion' where Olga is subject to professional assessment of what she can or can't do safely. Care is then allocated on what is determined at an institutional level rather than on Olga's own lifestyle or personal preferences. This obscures any appreciation of Olga's strengths and potential. Further, 'economic exclusion' has resulted from Olga's limited financial leverage to make real choices for example about her medication or getting out and about in the community.

These limitations often contradict the stated intentions of care and in Olga's situation may actually compromise her health and quality of life. The final area of exclusion identified by Grenier and Guberman (2009) refers to a person such as Olga's exclusion from meaningful relations where the dominance of meeting her personal care needs at home in turn

monopolises her time and thus limits her opportunities for pursuing leisure or social interaction. Hafford-Letchfield research (2011) has documented this common experience of older people who had previously led active lives but following an acute illness or new disability were confined to their own homes and subject to care regimes over which they did not have any control. Olga's forced withdrawal from the Polish Women's Labour Association ignores the psycho-emotional aspects of her support needs. As Olga has recently experienced grief and loss, this short term approach to meeting her support need could lead to longer term adverse consequences.

The issues arising in Olga's situation illustrate the various levels and dynamics around how power is asserted or expressed within what might seem to be a very straightforward situation. Being sensitive to the power inherent in Olga's care arrangements point us towards a need to assert social work values that promote a co-productive approach. Co-production defines the contribution of service users in policy terms (Needham and Carr, 2009). For social care it means involving service users in collaborative relationships to tackle issues together with more empowered frontline staff able and confident to share power and accept user expertise in developing appropriate support. For example, how far is the carer able to value the strengths that Olga has in order to find appropriate solutions? Theorists in social work with older people (Scourfield, 2007; Lymbery, 2010) for example have criticised the underpinning consumerist, entrepreneurial assumptions that older people are expected to share more responsibility and manage more risk in return for much greater control over resources and decisions. Co-production requires highly effective channels of communication between users, practitioners, commissioners and service managers and is very important in the front line of delivering support as Olga's relationship with her carer illustrates. Empirical research by Glendinning et al, (2006) using postal surveys and case studies in six localities identified that those outcomes identified by older service users themselves are inconsistently related to the aims of services currently constituting the bulk of care provision. They found that services prioritise older people's basic needs with least attention to keeping them active and sustaining social contacts as Olga would have experienced. These are everyday ethical issues to keep in mind within your assessment and support planning practice.

Earlier qualitative research by Qureshi and Henwood (2000) into what older people define as a 'quality service' identified that the commissioning of outcome-focused services for older people require a wider approach attending to leisure, learning and community cohesion where older people might be active participants and volunteers. Their recommendations stressed the importance of facilitating outcomes which address the process of seeking, obtaining and using services as these enhance or undermine the impact of services overall. Outcomes on the process of services included feeling valued and respected, and having an individual say or control over how services are provided. What these accounts did not acknowledge is that it is not only health and welfare services that play a part in older people's wellbeing but the effects of structural inequalities and material wellbeing. Olga's own individual identity and social capital may need to be explored in terms of her expectations and ability to exercise a real sense of agency when taking risks and finding a new role for herself.

Structured and institutional power

Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' (1991) offers a valuable theoretical perspective for understanding some of the power and rule within social care as featured in Olga's situation. Foucault asserted that the state needs to normalise the way it governs through its institutions of which social work plays a significant part. According to Epstein (1999) social work influences and motivates people to adopt normative views by enabling service users to accommodate to the status quo. However, social work can also be seen as challenging the status quo by trying to bring about social change enshrined in its ethics and value base, which highlights the dissonance intrinsic to the nature of social work. Governmentality refers not only to the institution or political powers of the state but to how individuals are active in their own government. For example, feeling anxious and needing to be able to fix things is something we all face in social work practice, but also being willing and supported to explore problems in partnership with service users can help us move away from more technical approaches often encouraged or expected towards more relationship-based approaches. These essential steps may have been missed in Olga's situation. Within social care self-esteem and empowerment are increasingly seen as ethical obligations of citizenship and matters of personal and social responsibility.

To unpick further how power operates, Foucault's conception of discourse and discursive formation enables us to question how service users and carers are represented in government policy and how policy shapes our understanding of social care users. Alongside perspectives of its 'subject' one can anticipate a dialectical relationship, between power and resistance where neither is passive or in total control. More fundamentally, Foucault alluded to the transformative potential of his ideas by illustrating through his careful exposure that many discourses about institutions are not natural which we do not need to take as inevitable or absolute. Change can come from the realisation of the precarious nature of established ways and by inviting the development of alternatives. In summary, we learn from Foucault that social workers who become socialised to professional practices often lose the stronger challenging voice they expressed when they entered the field. In order to maintain that voice they have to actively resist the acquisition of a more distanced professional language and the corresponding skills.

Building on Foucault's work, Chambon (1999, p.78) recommends that ethical social workers might utilise the following building blocks and ways of conceptualising power by:

- Allowing oneself to be 'unsettled' to move away from pre-established models and open up new avenues of questioning practice.

- Historicizing our understanding of reality by retracing how particular practices and forms of knowledge have been created and adopted over time and not accepting these as absolute truths. The voices and narratives of service users are crucial here.

- Examining 'practices' (accepted ways of doing things) and the 'texts' (such as policies or procedures) in a detailed manner to reveal hidden patterns and effects on practice. This helps to enhance our grasp of the different ways in which power is manifested and concurrently to consider the multifunctionality of practices and discourses.

- Linking subjectivity to actions and knowledge to help us better understand how social work activities create and sustain the distinctions between 'user' and 'professionals'. This also involves conceiving of different forms of knowledge, practice and their systems of rules as those which can be modified and transgressed. Different types of knowledge such as tacit, experiential or user-led knowledge would be important to recognise here.

- Exploring new possibilities through the use of critical reflection.

Opportunities within social work practice such as within supervision, team work and the everyday use of advocacy through use of the self can help you to raise issues and questions that are more curious about policy and practice than accepting. Having a confident grasp of the issues impacting on practice is essential before being able to tackle broader bases of power as the next session illustrates.

Radical social work and power at the structural level

Social work has attempted to grapple with the concept of empowerment through the development of theories on power influenced by features of Marxist, socialist and radical ideologies, structural/sociological understanding of interesting oppressions and emancipatory and feminist perspectives (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009). Based on these, power is mostly conceptualised within institutional and macro levels of society and manifest through its power structures alongside individually focused practice. Radical social work has called for a more conceptual model for understanding multiple layers of oppression, privilege and power dynamics and how they impact on the individual as well as how to engage with these in everyday practice .

More recently, some argue that due to the limitations of radical social work it has received limited support amongst front-line practitioners or it has been incapable of offering practitioners tangible, pragmatic or sustainable ways of meeting needs of service users at the micro level (Carey and Foster, 2011). Ferguson and Lavalette (2004) have sought to demonstrate the relevance of Marx's concept of alienation to inform the development of critical or emancipatory social work practice. Whilst the grand narratives of Marxism or feminism are now marginalised within social work theory and practice, they remain useful in illustrating the sense of powerlessness that can emerge during difficult socio-economic climates. This is at the heart of Marx's theory of 'alienation' which Ferguson and Lavalette (2004) argue, still has considerable relevance in explaining the rise of individualism and the downplaying of structural oppression experienced by service users. For example, in relation to the impact of marketisation in social care, many commentators have reflected on the increased proceduralisation of assessment and care provision and the application of eligibility criteria. The act of commissioning care is seen as an 'alien' object and according to Ferguson and Lavalette, as the welfare state has retreated in the face of the developing industry around social care, social work has become distanced social work and less in control of both scarce resources and the process of providing support. Other examples of where social work skills have been subordinated to managerialism were exemplified in the UK Social Work Task Force report (DoE, 2009) which documented a number of challenging issues. For example,

there was frequent reference to the excessive use of electronic information systems where loss of control over process was replaced by ever increasing administrative demands. Faced with these working conditions, social workers expressed how they felt their values and ethics were being compromised with the resultant loss of professional discretion and the jeopardising of personal and therapeutic relationship with service users (Munro, 2011). Dunk-West (2013) discusses these dilemmas in relation to how social workers need to focus on reflexivity. She asserts that the choice of words and the way we frame social work, whilst influenced by historical, social, cultural and political contexts, they should never dictate what social work entails. Instead, Dunk-West stresses how the 'social work self' can be made through understanding and commitment to the purpose of your work with others and ongoing interactions between yourself and those you work with, including your colleagues, employers and service users. This interactionist approach should enable you to move between these different modes of power as we will now explore further in the next section.

Personal power and the role of identity

As we saw in Olga's situation, feeling empowered or powerful has an ontological nature as well engendering a sense of self-worth, a process that may fluctuate throughout the life course or as a result of external and internal influences (Phillipson, 2000). Those theorists interested in the concept of 'agency' or identity politics (Fraser, 1996) argue for more humanistic and interpretive forms of theory about power, based on biographical or narrative perspectives. This allows empowerment to be not only examined through the proposed transformation of society as discussed earlier, but also through the creation of shared meanings and the establishment of positive social identities. The 'sociology of childhood' for example describes children as argentic with a capacity for competence and children being perceived as citizens both in the current and future context (Pinkey, 2011). The increased use of life course and attachment theory in social work with adults can prompt different and more rounded understandings of harm and abuse and lead to more holistic responses that explore the problems from the point of view of experiences of both 'victims' and perpetrators. Bowes and Daniel (2010) remind us that safeguarding work is explicitly associated with power dynamics between service user's interpersonal relationships and the powers used by professionals to intervene. The recognition of agency and resilience are therefore useful concepts that can be contextualised to explore different types of abuse and their construction as social problems. Some of Bowes and Daniel's ideas are used to explore the power dynamics in the following case study:

Case study no 2

Chen is a 36 year old Nigerian man who has been living in Wales for eight years. Chen has two undergraduate degrees in engineering and management and a post-graduate diploma in human resource development. He has not been able to capitalise on his qualifications and is currently working as a security guard in a local factory. He is married to Bola, a 28 year old woman who he met in his Nigerian home town 10 years ago and who only recently came to the UK to live with him. Her citizenship status is not yet secure. Bola has recently been diagnosed with bi-polar disorder when her behaviour becomes very unpredictable. Bola is

also in the early stages of pregnancy and this is a cause for concern as their living accommodation is unsuitable, they have several debts and no family living close by. Bola is reluctant to take any medication for fear of jeopardising her pregnancy.

Chen is very dominant in the relationship and appears to be very controlling. More recently, he has been physically aggressive towards Bola with neighbours reporting domestic violence on two occasions. Chen then assaulted Bola very badly following an occasion when she spent a lot of money they didn't have on some new clothes. Bola was admitted to hospital and nearly lost her baby. The police are taking steps to prosecute Chen although Bola returned home to him. As a result of a case conference, the social worker was asked to undertake an assessment under the Mental Health Act as Bola is becoming severely depressed, is refusing ante-natal care and neglecting herself and possibly her unborn child.

It is useful to stand back and consider the presence of different power relations in this case study and to identify where the power is potentially located including how it is manifest at both structural and individual levels. Whilst the safety of Bola and her unborn child is absolutely paramount, the situation remains very complex at a number of levels. It is clear that a sense of powerlessness prevails for both Chen and Bola if one considers the issues of poverty, ill health and other psycho-social frustrations likely to be present. We know from research that these different indicators are likely to contribute to individuals or groups behaving in violent or anti-social ways. Serious consequences may result if intervention does not take place in a timely or sensitive way. Within the field of domestic violence, the attention given to power and control within violent intimate relationships have provided clear directives for how social workers might initially work with this family and the approaches evidenced to address issues of safety and human rights. There are also implications however for how social work explains and supports the different relationships present. For example by reducing the individualistic conception of power within the relationships between Chen and Bola to the interpersonal level, social work may act to obscure some of the other power discourses present in society. These might be manifest in the institutional racism and other discriminatory forces, experienced by Chen and the potential consequences for Bola and her unborn child if she becomes compulsorily detained using Mental Health legislation. Once the social worker intervenes in this family, the question remains as to how broader social change can be achieved and more holistic solutions found to the challenges faced by such a family? This particular case study captures some important power discourses about the underlying socio-economic problems and cultural barriers faced by vulnerable and hard to reach groups. At a broader level, you may ask how far social work can penetrate beneath to analyse the underlying social-economic relations and the context in which support is subsequently provided and to achieve meaningful anti-oppressive practice. Any broader strategies within safeguarding work similarly have to recognise the value of preventative work with families and community development approaches and the role that social work can play in improving service user's material circumstances and in giving marginalised communities a sense of their own power, choice and control.

Similar to the issues raised by the case of Olga, the experiences and views of different minority groups may be fundamentally influenced by social exclusion, which resulted in

isolation of families from service access, lack of support for family carers and lack of choice. Strategies that maximise participation are key to valuing any approaches that are based on their strengths. These illustrate that interventions need to address users' needs beyond safeguarding work and to promote human rights. Responding accurately and holistically to discrimination and oppression are highly relevant as illustrated in the situation of Bola and Chen and suggest that harm and abuse are issues that, according to Bowes and Daniel (2010), resonate far beyond the approaches that social workers currently use to specifically to address them. Research into power relations contained within the participation process by Pinkey (2011) highlighted three levels of anxieties commonly invoked in work with children and families. Firstly, there are the anxieties and stress of the welfare institutions themselves as they try to balance the competing rights between parents, children and professionals. Secondly, there is the anxiety and stress experienced by individual professionals within those organisations who are working directly with children and trying to balance children's rights within a complex field of rights. Thirdly, Pinkey referred specifically to the concerns of children and young people about their difficulties with participation in decision making processes that relate to their lives. This research makes visible some of the difficulty of working with these complexities and is clearly a dilemma for the social worker working with Bola and Chen. Pinkey talks about understanding the emotional dilemmas for professionals within participatory policy and practice with children, young people and their families. This entails moving beyond the current state of play where many report not feeling listened to, taken seriously, or having their views heard. Understanding some of the challenges and resistance to change involves further research and insight into the different ways that adults and professionals negotiate and enact participation and the challenges faced in doing this effectively (Pinkey, 2011, p 45). Within interprofessional work, the phenomenon of power is perhaps more commonly and comfortably discussed in terms of authority, status, territory or influence. Whilst interprofessional work projects the notion that all professions have an equally important role to play in the delivery of care, there is still a great deal of evidence that demonstrates how some professions continue to protect exclusive areas of knowledge and work practices which monopolise specific areas of knowledge and expertise.

The positive use of power – exchanging power ethically through user narratives and pedagogies

As discussed earlier in this chapter, organisations are powerful sites for influencing social work practice, where the organisational systems enable professionals to distance themselves from the people they are working with. Much has been written in social work about defensive anxiety and the elaborate guidelines and procedures which constrain the way individuals work. Welfare organisations working in high-risk areas, such as child protection, where the highest anxiety is aroused, expect high degrees of accountability from staff. However, the institutional response is one which, it has been argued, can lead to defensive, procedural, checklist, regulation and control driven practice. The importance of emotional literacy which engages with ethics and values as well as professional competence in being able to communicate with service users about difficult and sensitive issues illustrates the

importance of participation as part of a process rather than a one-off event which is 'done to' a service user.

We end this chapter by turning to the potential of participation in rebalancing power relations at different levels and promoting empowerment. We have identified some of the potential contradictions that policy imperatives towards participation have posed in the actual implementation. Seeking to improve participation and involvement can also draw on an alternative body of critical educational literature informed by historical materialist theory and socialist politics (Freire, 1972). Social work could engage with this in order to enter debates about service users own empowerment through increased participation and the skills and knowledge required to participate effectively. Some researchers for example have asserted that social pedagogy (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010, 2011); its provision and support should recognise the importance of informal, incidental and embedded learning occurring in settings such as families, communities and social movements. Social care environments play a significant part here. Achieving recognition requires the development of appropriate pedagogical solutions for policy makers, professionals enacting policy in social care practice environments as well as for service users themselves. Habermas' (1984) and later Mezirow's' critically important distinction between instrumental and communicative learning is relevant. Mezirow utilised Habermas third domain of emancipation which involved:

"becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting the structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these understandings" (Mezirow, 1981, p5).

Through their relationships practitioners might equip service users with the power of criticism and create opportunities for the development of critical consciousness for transformative action (Mezirow (2009). Service users need opportunities to engage in processes wherein dominant social and political ideologies can be deconstructed. Mezirow (2009) referred to emotional aspects of living, making reference to emotional intelligence and to understanding the cognitive domain of learning and different levels and forms of reflective activity. However, this assumes that professionals are themselves critically reflective and we refer back to the pointers given by Chambon (1999) earlier that facilitate the conceptualisation and analysis of power through the provision of more enhanced opportunities. Within social work education and practice there are a number of mitigating cultures and tensions in encouraging mutual interaction between professionals and service users. These assert task focussed orientations in practice, with a dominant procedural culture where professionals seek to 'fix things' and perception that professionals must remain 'objective'. In their professional code of practice, social workers hold strong beliefs about not engaging in self-disclosure with service users. These conditions not only directly discourage critical reflection, but may also actually create conditions that make it more difficult (Fook and Askeland, 2007). Nevertheless, empowerment-based practice within social work practice recognizes the importance of linking micro-educational and practice methodologies to theories of social change. If the development of critical consciousness within the service user movement is an important precursor to critical action where the self is

a key site of politicization, different approaches will need to be developed and fostered. It is suggested here that adopting a learning and educational approach within social work practice might be one aspect which could provide people with scope to extend their understandings of themselves and the contexts from within which a more liberating approach to self-directed support and a person-centred approach might be developed.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at some of the dynamics involved in the way in which power is conceptualised within social work practice and has made particular reference to the shifting priorities of government policy and its resultant political, socio-economic context. The implications would appear to have shifted social work away from more radical and critical theoretical interrogation of power towards a more individualised approach in which power is used uncritically to manage the everyday lives of services users. The ideas of Foucault are useful in analysing the discourses, ruling practices and moral imperatives which influence the way in which social work enacts power which tends to be more technical rather than ontological. Some of these aspects were illustrated in the two case studies in which we examined different ways in which social exclusion might be perpetuated. Identifying the causes and effects of power can take us some way to becoming more reflective and proactive practitioners and calls for more imaginative use of tools, techniques and interventions which resonate with the aspirations and potential of those we work with.

Chapter summary and key issues

- Power can be conceptualised in different ways within social work and it is essential that you are able to interrogate power critically to identify how to use it as positively in practice.

- Having a good theoretical knowledge of power can help to deconstruct its enactment and to exert influence which accounts for and works positively with power at both the structural and individual level.

- Using opportunities to be a curious, reflexive and proactive practitioner in a way that revisits social work ethics and values will facilitate more user centred and authentic practice.

References

Bar-On, A (2002) Restoring power to social work practice British Journal of Social Work, 32 (8) : 997-1014

Birmingham Safeguarding Board (2013) Serious Case Review: In respect of the death of Keanu Williams Inquiry. Birmingham.

Bowes, A., Daniel, B. (2010) ‘Introduction: Interrogating Harm and Abuse: A Lifespan Approach’, Social Policy & Society 9 (2): 221–229

British Association of Social Workers (2013) All party parliamentary group on Social Work: Inquiry into the State of Social Work report. Birmingham, BASW

Carr, S. (2007) 'Participation, power, conflict and change: Theorizing dynamics of service user participation in the social care system of England and Wales', Critical Social Policy, 27 (2) : 266–76.

Chambon, A.S. (1999) 'Foucault's Approach', in A.S. Chambon, A. Irvine and L. Epstein (eds) Reading Foucault for Social Work, pp. 51–82. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cocker, C., Hafford-Letchfield, T. (forthcoming) Rethinking Anti-Discriminatory and Anti-Oppressive Social Work: Theories for Practice. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Department of Education (2009) Building a safe, confident future: The final report of the Social Work Task Force. London, DoE

Department of Health (2013) Integration of Health and Social Care. London: The Stationary Office.

Epstein, R. M. (1999). Mindful practice. Journal of the American Medical Association, 282: 833–839.

Ferguson, I. and Woodward, J. (2009) Radical social work: Making a difference. Bristol: Policy Press.

Ferguson, I. and Lavalette, M. (2004) 'Beyond Power Discourse: Alienation and Social Work' British Journal of Social Work. 34 (3): 297-312.

Fook, J., Askeland, G. A., (2007) 'Challenges of critical reflection: 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained'. Social Work Education', 26 (5): 520–533.

Foucault, M. (1991) 'Governmentality', translated by Rosi Braidotti and revised by Colin Gordon, in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds) The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.

Fraser, N. (1996) Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Delivered at Stanford University April 30–May 2, 1996, available online from: http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/Fraser98.pdf

Freire, P. (1972) Pedagogy of the Oppressed. UK, Penguin

French, J.P. and Raven, B.H. (1986) The bases of social power, in D.Cartwright and A.F. Zander (eds) Group Dynamics: Research and Theory (3rd edition), New York: Harper and Row.

Glendinning, C. (2009) 'The consumer in social care' in R. Simmons, M. Powell and I. Greener (eds.) The Consumer in Public Services, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Glendinning, C., Clarke, S., Hare, P., Kotchetkova, I., Maddison, J. and Newbronner, L. (2006) 'Outcome-focused services for older people', Knowledge Review, No. 13, Bristol: Policy Press with the Social Care Institute for Excellence.

Grenier, A., and Guberman, N. (2009) 'Creating and sustaining disadvantage: the relevance of a social exclusion framework', Health and Social Care in the Community, 79; (2):116-124.

Habermas, J. (1984) The Theory of Communicative Action Vol. 1: Reason and Rationalization of Society. (Translated by Thomas McCarthy) Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hafford-Letchfield, T. (2010) The age of opportunity? Revisiting assumptions about the lifelong learning needs of older people using social care services. British Journal of Social Work, 40, (2): 496-512.

Hafford-Letchfield, T. (2011) Grey matter really matters: A study of the learning opportunities and learning experiences of older people using social care services. International Journal of Education and Ageing. 2 (1): 8-23.

Harris, J. (2003) The Social Work Business. London: Routledge.

Heffernan, K. (2006) 'Social Work, New Public Management and the Language of 'Service User'. British Journal of Social Work, 36 (1):139-147.

Her Majesty's Government (2008) Transforming social care. Local Authority Circular LAC (DH) (2008) (1), London: The Stationery Office.

Hicks, S. (forthcoming) 'Rethinking the Family' in C.Cocker and T.Hafford-Letchfield (2013) Rethinking Anti-Discriminatory and Anti-Oppressive Social Work: Theories for Practice. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Laming, (2009) The Protection of Children in England: A progress report. London: The Stationary Office.

Leece, D. and Leece, J. (2006), 'direct payments: creating a two-tiered system in social care?' British Journal of Social Work, 36 (8): 1379–93.

Lukes, S. (2005). Power: A radical view. 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave, Macmillan.

Lymbery, M. (2010) A new vision for adult social care? Continuities and change in the care of older people. Critical Social Policy, 30 (1): 5-26.

Lymbery, M., Postle, K. (2010) Social Work in the Context of Adult Social Care in England and the Resultant Implications for Social Work Education British Journal of Social Work 40 (8): 2502-2522

Mezirow, J (1981) 'A critical theory of adult learning and education'. Adult Education. 32 (1): 3-23.

Mezirow, J. (2009) An overview on transformative learning in K, Illeris. (Ed) Contemporary theories of learning: Learning theorists...in their own words. London: Routledge.

Munro, E. (2011) The Munro review of child protection: Final report, a child-centred system. Department of Education, HMSO.

Needham, C. and Carr, S. (2009) 'Co-production: an Emerging Evidence Base for Adult Social Care Transformation'. Research Briefing no 31. London: Social Care Institute for Excellence.

Phillipson, C. (2000) Critical and educational gerontology: Relationships and future developments, in F. Glendenning (ed.), Teaching and Learning in Later Life, Farnham: Ashgate.

Pinkey, S. (2011) 'Participation and Emotions: Troubling Encounters Between Children and Social Welfare Professionals', Children & Society, 25 (1): 37–46.

Qureshi H. and Henwood M. (2000) Older People's Definitions of Quality Services. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Sakamoto, I., and Pitner, R.O. (2005) 'Use of critical consciousness in anti-oppressive social work practice: Disentangling power dynamics at personal and structural levels'. British Journal of Social Work 33 (4): 435-452

Scourfield, P. (2007) 'Social care and the modern citizen: Client, consumer, service user, manager and entrepreneur', British Journal of Social Work, 37 (1): 107–22.

Smith, R (2008) Social Work and Power. Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan.

Stevens, M., Glendinning, C., Jacobs, S., Moran, N., Challis, D., Manthorpe, J., Fernandez, J, L., Jones, K., Knapp, M., Netten, A., Wilberforce, M. (2011) 'Assessing the Role of Increasing Choice in English Social Care Services' Journal of Social Policy, 40, (2): 257–274.

Webb, S (2010) '(Re)Assembling the Left: The Politics of Redistribution and Recognition in Social Work' British Journal of Social Work